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GROUP PROJECTS IN UPPER-GRADE COMPOSITION

GRACE H. RYFFEL
Wyman School, St. Louis, Missouri

Oral exposition work, because of its utilitarian value, has an unquestioned claim to a place on the upper-grade composition program. My first attempt at this type of work brought a few interesting and well-prepared talks. Too large a majority of the pupils, however, had chosen subjects which were either too simple for the rest of the class or beyond the comprehension of both the class and the individuals giving them. In consequence, the work was neither interesting nor valuable. I found two principal causes of this failure. First, there was a lack of unity in the subjects treated by the class as a whole; second, we had not taken sufficient time to discover the real interests of the class nor investigated thoroughly enough the subjects chosen.

An Arts and Crafts Exposition held in St. Louis during November suggested a plan. Could the children hold an arts and crafts exposition? Could such a project be utilized in composition? My beginning eighth-grade class answered the question with enthusiasm. With the thought of preparing an exposition to be presented for the enjoyment and enlightenment of the other seven rooms in our department unit, they set to work. They chose to call their project "The Junior Arts and Crafts Exposition."

During two forty-minute periods suggestions for subjects were offered and discussed. Finding out what fifty members of a class were really interested in was worth the time. Individuals who had never worked together began to discover interests in common. Gradually groups from two to eight in number were formed, the larger groups selecting leaders to guide the work. The first work undertaken in each group was a determination of the phase of the subject for which each member of the group should be held responsible. Then began the work of gathering information for the talks, of making drawings, and of preparing other concrete material.

Though the groups worked separately, much of the progress of the individual group was known to the class as a whole. When a member of one group found valuable material for another group, he gave it freely. The desire to make the whole exposition a success was greater than the desire to make the group work alone successful. As an example of this, Virginia, whose brother had served Uncle Sam as an aviator, knew a good deal more than even the average boy about aeroplanes. She had pictures and books which gave valuable information on this subject. Though allied with the home group, she furnished the boys of the aeroplane group valuable material and even arranged for a meeting between her brother and them.

Much reading was done, and, in three groups, trips were voluntarily made after school hours so that the individuals might better acquaint themselves with their subjects. A telephone exchange was visited by members of the telephone group; several "model" homes in the department stores of the city were visited by the home group; while members of the aeroplane group availed themselves of the opportunity to see the NC4 during its stop in St. Louis.

We spent one period in making and criticizing short outlines for the talks and one period in oral practice. On the day prior to the first presentation of the talks to the entire class, our exhibition of concrete material was arranged on the stage of our assembly hall on a large semicircular table made of umbrella stands, boards from the manual-training department, and sheets. The limitations of space prevent my describing this exhibition in full. The home group had arranged a four-room model home using doll furniture; they had charts of sample wall papers (made from scraps of wall paper brought by members of the class); also charts of harmonious color combinations and furniture arrangements. Two members of this same group used a small bed to show how to make a bed correctly; they had everything from the extra blanket to the bedroom slippers and dressing-gown. Members of the aeroplane group constructed one aeroplane that would fly and had on exhibition several smaller models to illustrate the different types of aeroplanes. The three girls of the hat group had four or five

small hats of the latest fashion besides hats in the several stages of completion.

For three days the groups reported, on each day a new chairman being selected to lead the criticism. Finally by class vote a forty-minute program was selected and an invitation extended to the other seven rooms.

I had considered the talks interesting from the adult standpoint. I was somewhat skeptical as to their reception by the children of the other rooms, especially as our assembly room affords poor hearing facilities. Before beginning, we asked our audience to raise their hands whenever they were unable to hear. The audience were determined to get every word; the speakers were made to talk distinctly and loud enough to be heard throughout the room. With the giving of the first talks my skepticism vanished. I had but to watch the faces of our audience to know that *these* oral themes in exposition were "measuring up." The Junior Arts and Crafts Exposition was a success beyond a doubt.

Sidelights on such a project usually show its success or failure. One of the most delightful outcomes of this project was the work done by three boys. They had always been the most reserved members of the class and their composition work had been very poor. By their own choice, they worked together, calling themselves the birdhouse group. In two manual-training periods and what time before and after school they were willing to give, they constructed two excellently made birdhouses and a cat guard. One evening, when I remained at school later than usual, I was surprised to have the leader of this group come into the room an hour after closing time and ask me to go with him to the shop. He explained on the way that they had met with a difficulty and wanted my assistance. I found that the oatmeal box, which they had varnished to represent a tree and around which they had put the cat guard, was so slippery that the guard would not "stay put." This little incident proved to me that these hitherto slow fellows had been reached. The class and I were agreeably surprised with their explanations. A most successful advertising poster was suggested, designed, and executed by one of the boys who, though he had shown some ability to draw, had not been

recognized before for any unusual power. Growing out of the work of the aeroplane group, came a request to start an aeroplane club in the school.

The following are a few of the groups with the subjects they discussed:

- I. HOME GROUP
 1. How to Use Color in the Home
 2. How to Arrange Furniture
 3. How to Care for Furniture
 4. How to Make a Bed and Prepare It for Evening
 5. How to Keep the Bedroom Clean and Well Ventilated
 6. How to Set a Table for Breakfast
 7. How to Serve a Breakfast
 8. How to Prepare a School Lunch
- II. BIRDHOUSE GROUP
 1. How to Make a Birdhouse
 2. How to Make a Cat Guard
 3. The Value of the Bird to the Farmer
- III. CAMERA GROUP
 1. How the Camera Is Constructed
 2. How to Load a Camera
 3. How to Take a Picture
 4. How to Develop a Film
- IV. TELEPHONE GROUP
 1. The History of the Telephone
 2. How the Telephone Is Constructed
 3. How to Make a Toy Telephone
 4. How to Use the Telephone Correctly
- V. HAT GROUP
 1. The Tools Used in Hat-Making
 2. How to Make a Hat
 3. Some Interesting Hats of Long Ago
- VI. FLOWER GROUP
 1. How to Make a Bouquet and Keep It Fresh
 2. How to Pack Flowers to Send Away
- VII. AEROPLANE GROUP
 1. The History of the Aeroplane
 2. How the Aeroplane Works
 3. How to Construct a Model Aeroplane
 4. The Part Played by the Aeroplane in the Great War
 5. The Types of Aeroplanes
 6. A Recent Accomplishment of the Aeroplane and Future Possibilities of It